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**Political Communication in Post-Apartheid  
South Africa**

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# Political Communication in Post-Apartheid South Africa

## Introduction

Any politically interested foreigner visiting South Africa from the developed world would see and hear much in the country's mass communications infrastructure that would appear familiar. Much of this is due to the country's colonial legacy, which shaped both the country's media and political models. The oldest newspaper, for example, the *Cape Times*, as well as the state broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) overtly modeled themselves, (the latter following input from Lord Reith, head of the BBC), on British originals. In the post-*apartheid* era, the tabloid *The Daily Sun* pays tribute, in name if not in substance, to the UK's leading tabloid.

South Africa has four local national free-to-air television channels as well as subscription satellite television services carrying around a dozen international news channels. Each major city and many smaller ones have newspapers, often several. Large subscription papers are either in English or in Afrikaans, but many local newspapers publish in African languages. The country's papers carry extensive political coverage with robust commentary and debate, as well as sharp political satire in the form of cartoons or even satiric comic strips. More recently, tabloid newspapers have entered the market reaching new audiences and portraying new concerns. Much international material makes its way into local political news reporting, and many international publications like the *Financial Times*, *Time* or *Newsweek* are printed and distributed locally. There is also a robust culture of political discussion on talk radio and a growing, lively culture of internet debate and political blogging, and even a satiric internet-based news parody show, Z-news, on the lines of *Spitting Image*.

Yet this sense of familiarity risks missing many of the features that make South Africa – as a developing society with a racially diverse population and massive enduring social inequities – such an intriguing study of “mixed” political communications, combining features of pre-modern, modern and post-modern political communication, meaning that the influence of a local chief or union steward, broadcast political news, and new media forms like blogging and

Facebook all matter. For many black South Africans, the media landscape may seem characteristically modern: access limited to broadcast television or news provided in indigenous languages by a public broadcaster, or to widely read populist tabloid newspapers. For many wealthier South Africans, particularly whites, the media landscape now has all the characteristics of post-modernity: it is characterized by fragmentation, almost unlimited choice, and a diminishing sense of national conversation or shared political destiny.

We attempt to describe political communication in South Africa by looking, in turn, at (1) citizens, (2) media organizations and professionals, and (3) politicians and political parties, using survey data or other rigorous evidence wherever possible. The focus will be on how these actors communicate with one another, primarily through formal media but more broadly through the larger political system, as well.

This approach represents something of a departure from previous scholarly work, which has scarcely tried to bring the three actors into the same focus in any systematic way. In this previous work, we can distinguish five broad trends. The first tradition is that of studies taking the political economy of the media approach, with much of the work since the end of apartheid concerned with complex issues such as the effect of new patterns of media ownership, the role of the state broadcaster in a political economy system, or of ways in which the press have been seen to support a neo-liberal consensus around issues of government privatization. (Berger, 2004, Duncan, 2001, Mayher and McDonald, 2007, Peet, 2001, Teer-Tomaselli, 2004, Tomaselli, 2004)

A second major body of work has analyzed political communication during elections, either from the point of view of analysts or consultants or indeed politicians (Greenberg, 2009, Hofmeyr and Rice, 2000, Stromback and Kaid, 2008, Mattes and Institute for Democracy in South Africa. Public Opinion Service., 1995, Southall and Daniel, 2009, Piombo and Nijzink, 2005, Leon, 2008).

A third body of work which may remain largely invisible but has probably been far more influential than most academic analysis has come from professional bodies or analysts such as the Media Monitoring Project or Media Tenor South Africa, who often act as consultants to government or opposition parties or have been called on to analyze media coverage at contentious points such as during the Human Rights Commission's hearings into racism in the media.

A fourth influential body of work has come from commentators on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its work in South Africa but this work has in general dealt with issues of discourse or the findings or mechanisms of the commission rather than with the question of how many South Africans actually followed or were affected by the work of the commission. (Doxtader et al., 2007, Krabill, 2001, Krog, 1998, McEachern, 2002, Posel and Simpson, 2002, Sanders, 2007)

Fifth, there is a body of work that works more closely with issues of textual analysis, drawing on disciplines such as literary or rhetorical analysis. The most famous or infamous example of this kind of analysis was probably an analysis produced for the Human Rights Commission by Claudia Braude on racism in the media that drew on notions of subliminal racism and a methodology of deep reading that exasperated many media professionals and academics. (Berger, 2001, Glaser, 2000) While Braude's work may have drawn justifiable suspicion, there has been work that has looked at political rhetoric, in particular that of Mandela, Tutu and Mbeki, with more convincing results. (Salazar, 2002)

There are many other important scholarly and institutional analyses to which such a short summary cannot do justice, such as Adrian Hadland's attempt to apply the Hallin-Mancini model of political-media systems to South Africa, or Jane Duncan's analysis of the ANC's changing media policy, or work by Rob Horwitz and others on media policy and the forces shaping it. (Duncan, 2009, Duncan and Glenn, 2009, Hadland, 2007, Horwitz, 2001)

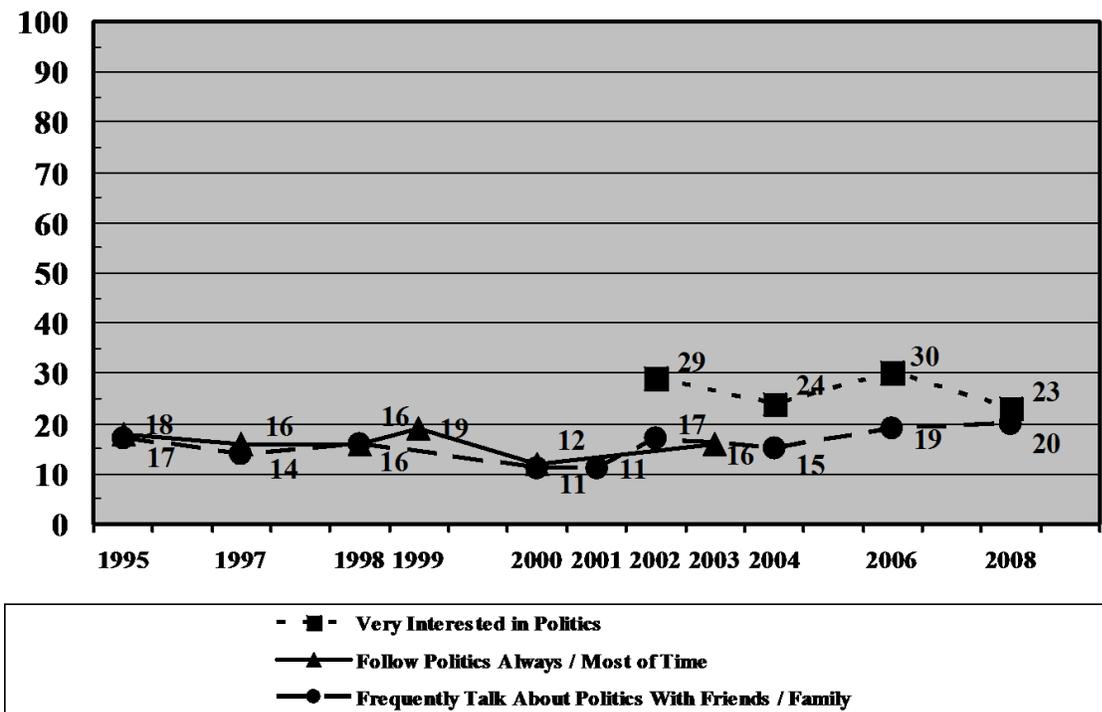
## **I. A: Citizens**

### **i) Introduction**

The world's image of South Africa was shaped by years of print news reports and photographs, and television footage of sustained mass resistance to the *apartheid* regime, culminating in the country's first democratic election and massive voter turnout captured in memorable images of long snake-like lines of voters patiently waiting to cast their ballots. The clear image is one of a politically conscious, highly engaged citizenry. The reality, however, is very different and has clear implications for the potential development of news media and political communication in the country.

First of all, South Africans have consistently displayed low levels of what political scientists call *cognitive engagement* (a combination of political discussion and political interest) (Dalton, 2009). Since 1995, no more than one-fifth of citizens have ever told interviewers they “follow” politics always or most of the time, or that they “frequently” discussed politics with friends or family. Measured in another way, no more than 30 percent has ever claimed to be “very interested” in politics (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Cognitive Engagement: Political Discussion and Political Interest



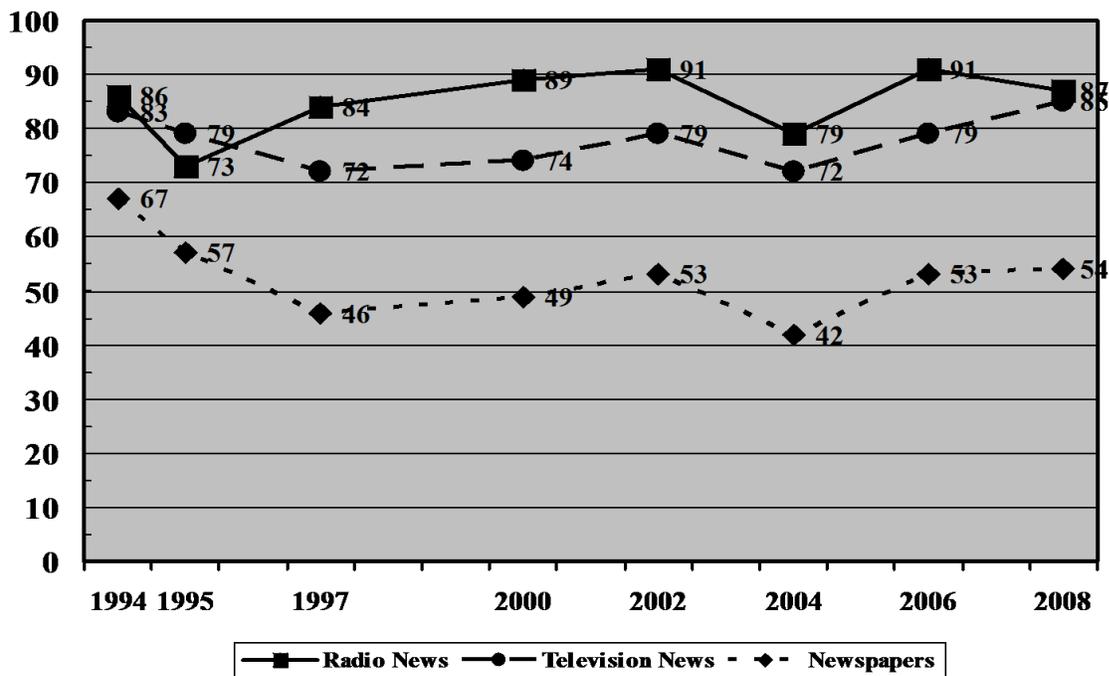
Some of this may reflect a “post-transition exhaustion” with politics, though the lack of pre-1994 national data prevents a firm conclusion. However, we do know that newspaper sales dropped dramatically after the 1994 election. (Hadland, 2007) The survey evidence displayed in Figure 2 shows that South African’s *virtual engagement* with the political system via the news media plunged dramatically after the country’s first democratic election. But unlike cognitive engagement, self-reported rates of radio news listenership recovered quickly, and television news viewership more slowly.

Newspaper readership of the broadsheets, however, still has yet to return to the levels recorded in 1994. Many newspaper readers have abandoned the traditional

broadsheets, which carried at least a modicum of government and political affairs coverage in favor of a swath of new, far less politically oriented tabloid newspapers aimed at working class black readers. The single most widely used newspaper during the 2009 election was *The Daily Sun* (read by 16 percent of all eligible voters).

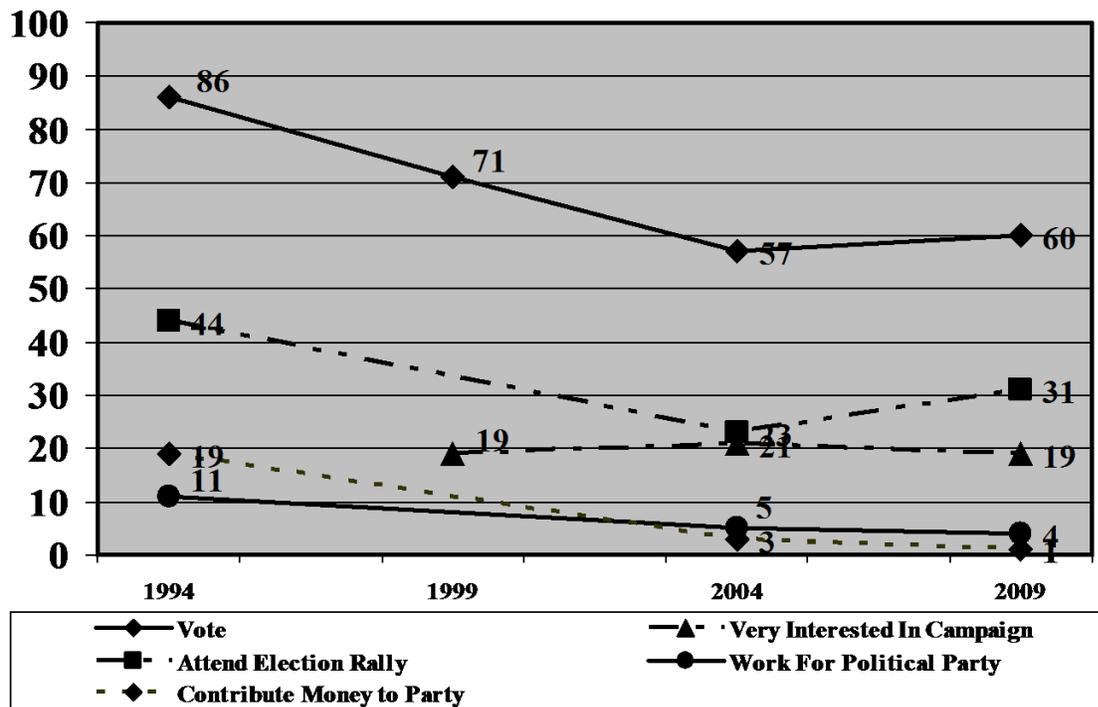
Radio remains the most frequently used source of news in South Africa, though television has almost caught up. Yet regardless of which is ahead, most South Africans get their news about politics from the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) particularly as it dominates news in indigenous languages. Fewer than six in ten citizens read newspapers on a regular basis. And while South Africa has a very high rate of mobile telephone penetration, access to the internet remains the preserve of a very small minority: just 2 percent told in 2009 that they had used the internet to follow news on the recent election campaign. Thus, South Africans’ “virtual engagement” with the political system remains one dominated by more passive forms of viewership and listenership (rather than the more active form of reading), and one dominated by news generated by state, rather than private news organizations.

Figure 2: Virtual Engagement: News Media Use (% Every Day / Few Days A Week)



Finally, South Africans' *physical engagement* with their political system has plummeted dramatically since 1994, though the most recent election saw a slight recovery. The easiest form of participation, voting, plunged 29 percentage points from 86 percent in 1994 to 57 percent in 2004, recovering slightly to 60 percent in 2009 (measured as a percentage of all eligible voters). The same trend characterizes attendance at campaign rallies. But doing work for a political party, or donating campaign funds has continued to fall to microscopic levels (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Campaign Participation (% At Least Once In Past Year)

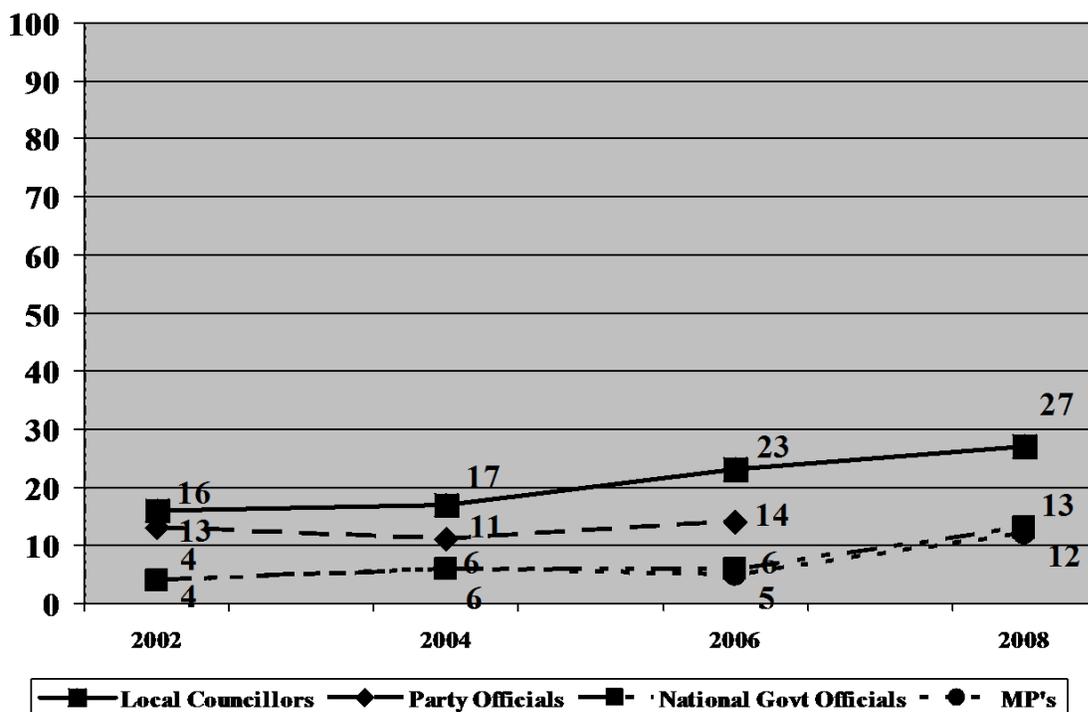


While the trend appears more recent, it appears that the frequency with which South Africans contact their elected leaders or government representatives is increasing, though from very low levels (Figure 4). Yet regardless of this trend, South African display some of the lowest levels of physical engagement with the political system in sub-Saharan Africa (at least amongst the 20 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2008) (see Mattes 2010 for a fuller discussion). Yet these low levels of engagement should not be attributed to a lack of capacity: South Africans have the highest levels of formal education and news media use across these countries. The real culprit is the country's almost pure form of party list proportional representation which provides party leaders with almost total leverage over elected officials and gives ordinary voters almost none, and thus offers few

incentives (and many disincentives) for elected officials to go out of their way to find out ordinary people’s problems, or for ordinary people to seek out their representatives to communicate their problems to them.

If South Africans believed that their complaints would receive attention, they would almost certainly communicate more often. When President Zuma opened a Presidential Hotline for complaints from the public, the line was overwhelmed with callers, some 27000 on the first day of operation. Soon the hotline, touted as an example of accountability and a new ethos, was failing to answer most of its calls.

Figure 4. Public Contact With Leaders Over Time (% At Least Once In Past Year)

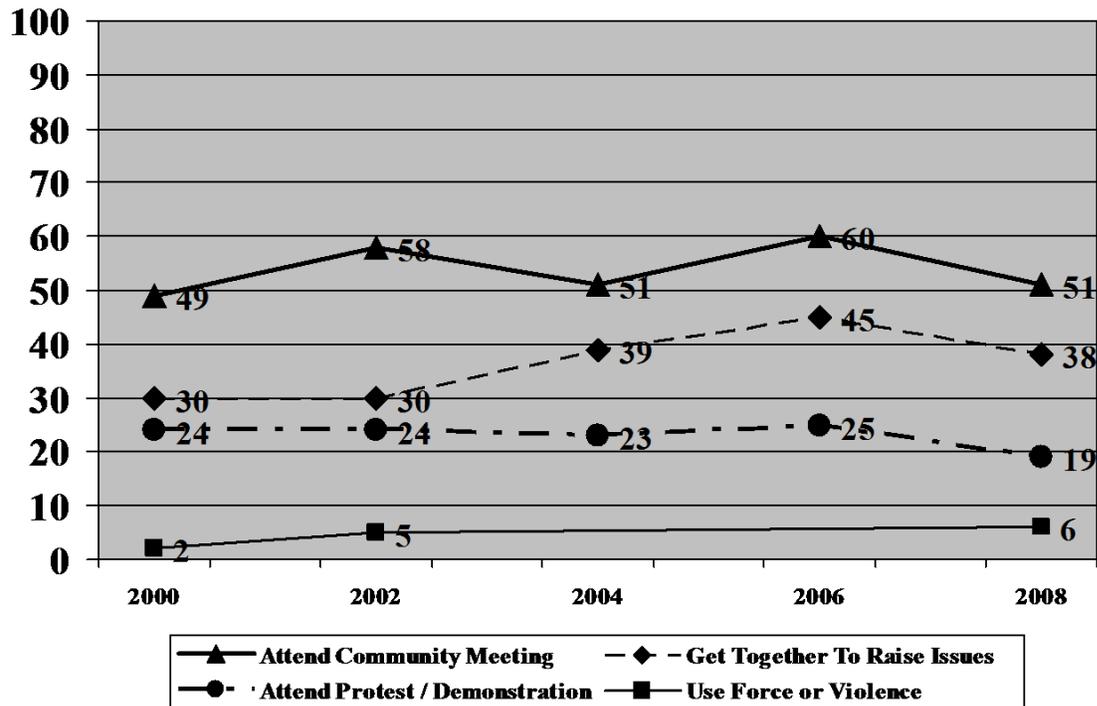


One area in which South Africans *are* on top of the log is in protest, much of it often violent. In 2008, one out of five respondents told surveyors that they had taken part in a protest or demonstration, and 6 percent said they had used force or violence. The Minister of Police, for example, reported that almost 6000 protest actions took place countrywide during the financial year 2004-2005, of which 881 were illegal. Typically, complaints, mostly from the poorest places in the country, centered on “service delivery,” meaning the slow or flawed construction of cheap, subsidized housing, and sanitation, water and electricity grids. Protests usually

involve petitions and marches, but when they turn violent also involve erecting barricades with things like burning tires to close streets or even main roads or national highways and destroying municipal property. In related events, labor strikes have turned violent more frequently, with the most dramatic example being a 2006 nation-wide strike by private security guards that led to the killing of some 69 people, either because they were suspected of not joining the strike or of being hired to replace the strikers, yet without any arrest of any of the murderers (Gordin and Momberg, 2007). In one sense, it is possible to interpret this as a simple return to the more familiar form of political expression learnt during the struggle against *apartheid*. But whatever frustrations people may have about the scope and speed of welfare and infrastructural development, they are exacerbated by what people experience as marginalization at the hands of an indifferent, if not hostile set of elected representatives.

The spasm of violence directed against foreigners in May 2008 brought the issues of urban township discontent to national and international prominence. During a three week period of xenophobic violence, some 100,000 foreigners (many of them asylum seekers, many without legal papers, but many legally in the country) and many locals were driven from their homes, 62 killed, and the country's image shaken. While some media analysts attacked local tabloids for stereotyping foreigners as criminals, media coverage seemed, in the inquest afterwards, to have played a relatively minor role in what happened and there is certainly evidence that the quality broadsheets and state media had neglected growing unrest among poorer South Africans about the pressures created by a large and growing number of foreigners in the country. Some evidence suggests that local instigators of violence, often alleged to be community leaders, were able to use modern communication forms like SMS messaging on cell phones to mobilize informal networks. There is also some evidence from a government inquiry after the event that something of a copy-cat result was in evidence, where the broadcast of xenophobic violence in some areas helped set it off elsewhere. (Glenn, 2008b).

Figure 5. Community Participation (% At Least Once In Past Year)



## ii) Racial difference and political communication

Given the history of *apartheid* and its enduring social and economic legacies, one could be excused for asking whether the trends described above adequately describe all South Africans. Table 1 displays the percentage differences across *apartheid* race categories. While there are some racial differences in the levels of cognitive engagement, the more important point is that they are relatively low across all groups. Conversely, virtual engagement, at least in terms of radio and television news, is very high across all groups, though there might be more important differences in the type of television that are masked by these numbers. Many whites, and to a lesser extent Indian and the "Coloured" (mixed race in South African apartheid categories) people have shifted away from the SABC to digital satellite television -- a move that could be attributed both to a dislike or distrust of the news they were and were not seeing and to a growing trend of opting out of local news for international entertainment and a typical post-modern fragmentation of television viewing.

The only real, major difference can be seen with respect to newspaper readership. Reflecting their economic and educational advantages, and their largely urban residence, rates of newspaper readership amongst whites (82 percent) and Indians (86 percent) almost double those of black (48 percent) and coloured (57 percent) South Africans.

There are much larger differences in levels of physical engagement, especially in terms of activities which involve collective action. Africans are three times more likely to have attended an election rally, and almost twice as likely to have gone to a community meeting or joined together with others to raise an issue as other South Africans. At first glance, it might seem that Africans violate this pattern with their higher rates of contacting elected leaders and government officials, but responses to follow-up questions show that Africans are far more likely to contact formal leaders as part of a group (rather by themselves) than other citizens are. Finally, the figures in Table 1 reveal that the waves of protest sweeping the country have been centered largely in the African community.

Yet the African electorate has also experience profound changes since 1994. Largely as a result of affirmative action in government hiring or black economic empowerment in the marketplace, the black middle class has grown exponentially; in relative terms moving from 1 percent of all blacks in 1990 to over 10 percent; in absolute terms, it is now as large as the white middle class. The rise of this new black elite, now labeled by the marketing industry as “Black Diamonds,” has been accompanied by a change in media style, ownership and concerns. The flagship English medium broadcasting channels such as SABC 3 news and SAFM radio have catered increasingly to the black middle class while SABC 1 and SABC 2, carrying African language programming, have concentrated on the emergent urban working class.

Yet it is not always clear that the new black elite has any strong impulse to found new forms of political communication or media that would reflect that. Attempts to start new media aimed directly at the black male middle class have tended to founder. For example, *Bl!nk*, a magazine aimed at black men, influenced by African-American concerns about black manhood, lasted only a few issues, and other media oriented towards a black elite have faced similar problems. It seems that wealthier black South Africans follow mainstream western entertainment and advertising. The major success story of black media has been the tabloids and the growth of African language newspapers such as *Isolezwe*, but there are as yet no studies of their political importance.

At the same time, while the top fifth of the African population have made real progress, and the extension of welfare networks and a lengthy period of economic growth under the new ANC government has led to a reduction in some of the worst forms of poverty and brought millions into higher economic categories, other observers argue that the bottom two fifths have moved backwards in real terms (Leibbrandt and Woolard, 2001). It is amongst this segment that political protest and violence have become a favored medium through which to communicate increasing frustration with the state of public services and the quality of political representation.

On the other end of the spectrum, white South Africans are characterized by the politics of withdrawal. By some estimates, over 800 000 whites, or some 20 percent of the pre-1990 population, have left the country, driven by concerns about crime and reduced life chances, and fearful about the future stability of the country. (Johnson, 2009) For many whites, events in Zimbabwe – especially arbitrary land seizures -- seemed an ominous warning about their own futures. Those who remain display high levels of news media use, but their rates of voting, campaign activity, community activity, and contacting political parties are far lower than either Africans or coloured citizens. It should also be noted that many whites living in South Africa are either foreign nationals or have dual citizenship, increasing the likelihood that many whites in the country will live in a sense as inner émigrés.

Coloured and Indian South Africans were historically middle groups in the apartheid social rankings. But patterns of political engagement amongst the economically better-off Indian community tend to resemble those of whites. The coloured community, on the other hand, seems to occupy a truly unique space between the high rates of community-centered participation of Africans and the levels of political withdrawal of whites and Indians. One often hears the complaint that while they were seen by whites as “too black” under apartheid, Coloured people are now seen by the majority African population as “not black enough.” While many of the ANC's leading figures came from both these communities, tensions have surfaced over time, particularly between African and Coloured voters or factions in the Western Cape Province. The ANC's loss of the city of Cape Town in 2005 and the larger province in the 2009 elections has to be seen primarily as the result of the disillusionment of working class Coloured voters in the Western Cape, where this group represents a majority of all voters.

The medium which represented this disillusionment most powerfully was *The Daily Voice*, a new tabloid aimed at Coloured voters (Glenn and Knaggs, 2008).

While the paper eschewed any overt political role, at one point fairly typically treating all the local political figures as Smurfs, its toughest criticisms were aimed at the ANC Mayor of Cape Town mayor, Nomaindia Mfeketo, and her controversial advisor, Blackman Ngoro, who had written on his website in 2005 that Africans were "culturally superior" to coloureds, who would "die a drunken death" if they did not undergo ideological transformation. Ngoro was suspended and eventually fired, partly a result of the *Daily Voice's* aggressive campaign against him. The Irish editor of the paper, Karl Brophy, recalls that the journalists of his paper received a heroes' welcome in a local night club in Cape Town, when the DJ introduced them, suggesting that at least in this case the aggressive stance of the tabloid in favor of its community was strongly appreciated.

Though South Africans may have turned violently against the government in power, evidence suggests that South Africans have come to accept a political system and peaceful change of government through the ballot box. This may be, to some extent, because it might be difficult to determine what exactly the major electoral ideological differences between political parties are in terms of economic and political policy, so that much of the debate in recent elections has focused on questions of moral fitness to govern, the character of opposing political leaders, and the dangers of one party dominance.

In 1994, it is widely argued that the final election results in Kwa-Zulu Natal were not an accurate reflection of the votes cast, but a political compromise based on the intransigence of Inkatha Freedom Party leader Buthelezi. In 2009, the IFP lost the election to the ANC in Kwa-Zulu Natal, while the ANC lost the Western Cape to the Democratic Alliance, and COPE, a new party arising out of a split in the ANC moved to becoming the official opposition in five provinces. All of these results were accepted without major complaints or outbreaks of violence and this is, given South Africa's previous history and many gloomy predictions of the likelihood of ongoing sectarian violence, a significant achievement.

It does seem that the inclusive style of government practiced by Nelson Mandela during his administration did manage to reduce the political tension in the country more generally, but it may also be that some media programs, like *Asikhulume*, aimed explicitly at encouraging debate, have helped. In any event, it is worth recording that while citizens have turned violently against the state and party officials in power, they have been less likely to turn on political opponents.

## Part B: The role of the Media

### Broadcast news

Partly because of the need to broadcast in 11 official languages in radio and on television, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), with an estimated staff of close to a thousand in its news divisions, is one of the world's largest news-gathering organizations. Because there have been few real news alternatives for African language speakers, the SABC plays a huge role in forming the political perceptions of around four out of every five South Africans. Not surprisingly, the SABC has been at the centre of passionate partisan and ideological clashes, and experienced intense internal conflict over the past two decades.

Because the SABC had been so blatantly a tool of state propaganda during *apartheid*, a strong coalition of domestic and international media experts worked to bring best modern practice to bear, especially regarding political coverage during elections, to ensure that it did not turn into a mouthpiece for the new government (Horwitz, 2001). Two of the positive outcomes were the appointment of an ostensibly independent SABC Board to control the SABC and of an Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) that started operation in 1994 to ensure that broadcasting did not become a fief of the political party in control. (In 2000 the IBA was merged into the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) with the new body assuming control of broadcasting and telecommunications.)

For a time, the new SABC appeared to approach the ideals of an independent public broadcaster but political interference from the President's office in the selection of later SABC Boards and a series of incidents and high profile resignations have dented the SABC's credibility as an independent news source. For much of the Mbeki presidency it was widely seen by most independent analysts to exude a strong pro-ANC bias, especially since the news department came under the control of former ANC propagandist Snuki Zikalala. Several incidents drew particular condemnation: the non-coverage of the booing of Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka at a rally (Mofokeng, 2005); the 'blacklisting' of political commentators who took a line contrary to the SABC's preferences (FXI, 2006); and the lengthy coverage of the ANC's election manifesto launch in January 2009 which escaped the restrictions of election coverage rulings by occurring before the election campaign had officially started.

In spite of the arguments about the manifesto coverage in 2009, the rift within the ANC caused by the unprecedented, successful 2008 challenge of President Thabo Mbeki by Jacob Zuma for party leadership (after Mbeki had fired Zuma for corruption in 2005) arguably led to more balanced news coverage of the 2009 general election by the SABC. The new party COPE received fairly extensive coverage, with the ANC complaining at points that it was receiving far more coverage from the SABC than was warranted and some in the ANC calling for the removal of Zikalala, seen as a pro-Mbeki figure secretly favoring COPE.

The SABC has also come under fire for its manipulation of the news agenda and ignoring social, economic and political problems embarrassing to the ruling party. For instance, some argue that the emphasis on corporate profitability and on supporting the government's privatization campaigns have led it to ignore certain audiences and under-report the extent and legitimacy of anti-privatization campaigns and service delivery protests. (Duncan, 2005) The SABC has also been seen to soft-pedal crime coverage in South Africa, especially murder or rape. In a country with 50 murders a day, the SABC 3 evening news, according to Media Tenor figures for 2006, covered murder on average once a week

A major problem for the SABC in terms of revenue and, arguably, ideology was that it lost its monopoly on domestic television broadcast news. While the private subscription channel M-Net, launched in 1986 carried a minimum of news, its one-hour weekly investigative news show *Carte Blanche*, based on the American *60 Minutes*, remained influential, yet scarcely dented nightly news viewing. But in 1998, a broadcasting license was granted to e-tv, a new, privately owned television channel. E-tv news began to win over many viewers, particularly whites who were dissatisfied at the SABC's failure to cover the disputed Zimbabwean elections in 2000 and the seizures of white farmers' land as thoroughly as e-tv was doing.

Broadcasting policy decisions may have changed the political communication significantly, particularly in the decision to leave the state broadcaster largely reliant on advertising revenue and to opt for national rather than local independent television stations, leaving South Africa without local television networks or news services. (Duncan and Glenn, 2009) This has reinforced a sense of politics as an elite national discourse and weakened the importance of local and provincial government at the expense of national government (Simeon and Murray, 2001). Had there been provincially-based television news services, local political figures and local and regional politics and investigations might have had different importance and weight. In reality, the ANC goes into elections without even

indicating who the provincial premier will be after the election – the equivalent of the Democrats or Republicans asking voters in California or New York to vote for them without indicating who their candidate for Governor will be.

If local television news tends, as a host of American academic studies suggests, to emphasize violent crime and imaginary dangers, (Gross and Aday, 2003, Gerbner and Gross, 1976, Kang, 2005) then South Africa, with a violent crime rate some eight to ten times greater than that in the USA, might well have found local news making crime a hot political issue faster than happened in South Africa, where the national broadcaster has certainly shown great restraint. Violent local protests against service delivery would probably also have received more attention and had more effect on local news stations.

While the new SABC is nominally a national broadcaster with government funding, it has become more reliant on advertising for the major part of its revenue, and thus also has to attempt to meet commercial imperatives. In such an environment, there is a tension between meeting the pressures (real or perceived) from political masters, on one hand, and providing news that is seen as ideologically hostile and drives away lucrative audiences. Thus, armed with increasingly sophisticated market research, news organizations may unconsciously or consciously try and to please or meet the expectations of a particular viewer group, particularly as advertisers are also basing their choice of channels on the same market research and place their advertisements where wealthier consumers might see them.

One important consequence of the increased competition from e-tv which aired its evening television news an hour earlier than the SABC, was that the SABC moved its flagship SABC3 news broadcast to the same time slot, but also hired e-tv's news producer Jimi Matthews. Ironically, while the old SABC television news programs had been structured along racial lines, *apartheid* political concerns ensured that all South Africans were given the *same* version of the news as a form of censorship. And during the early days of the new SABC and heads such as Allister Sparks, conscious steps were taken to ensure a common approach to news. Under Matthews, however, the SABC moved to a balkanized or federalized approach where news agendas are differentiated along language and even commercial grounds. Studies have found, for example, significant differences between English and Nguni service coverage of developments in Zimbabwe, or English and Zulu coverage of Jacob Zuma during his 2007 rape trial. English language television broadcasts on the SABC, in line with English print media and international media,

framed Zimbabwe and, by implication, Africa more generally, as a realm or zone of disorder, while the SABC Zulu and Xhosa broadcasts took it for granted that Zimbabwe and, by extension, Africa more generally, was a realm of order threatened by neo-colonial interventions such as the attempted coup planned for Equatorial Guinea. (Glenn, 2005) Thus, it is less likely now than under apartheid that citizens of different races or language groups watch or share the same news. Elihu Katz has warned, drawing on the example of Israel, of the dangers for citizenship of having a segmented fragmented news media landscape, particularly for television news (Katz, 1996). In South Africa the evidence suggests that white and black South Africans get very different pictures of, say, Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwean President, and his role in and effect on his country. Given how strongly the resonances of Zimbabwean experience are felt in South Africa, the SABC, by segregating views according to the channels watched, failed to try to forge a common understanding on, or even debate about, Zimbabwe.

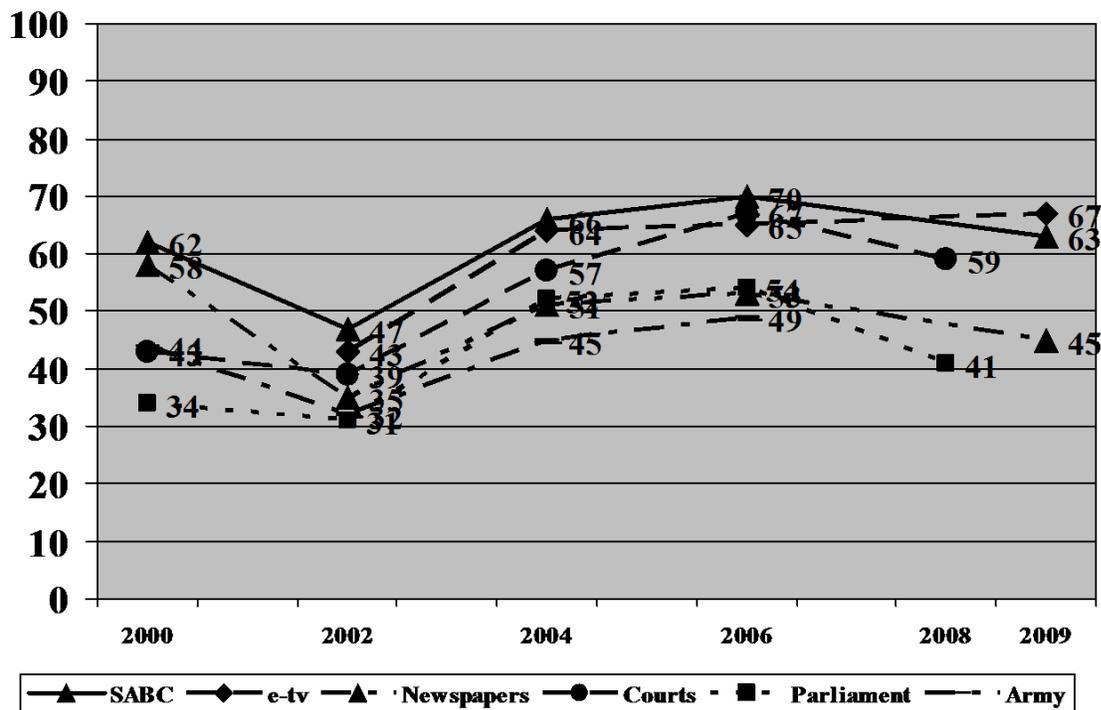
Political broadcasts are much more scrupulously monitored and political coverage is probably fairer during election campaigns than at other times as it is based on the number of candidates fielded. During elections, the ANC thus receives a smaller share of coverage from the SABC than its share of the actual vote. During the 2004 campaign, e-tv went a step beyond the public broadcaster by providing free airtime to all political parties with parliamentary representation to present their election manifestos.

There have been very few studies of the SABC's African language radio stations, though they attract far more viewers than most commercial radio stations. More interest has been given to talk radio because while talk radio in the USA is seen largely as a right-wing phenomenon, in the last days of the *apartheid* regime, and in the early 1990s, talk radio on private radio stations such as Radio 702 and on the SABC's SAFM became a space for inter-racial discussion and questioning of the status quo. The private talk stations have increasingly become spaces for anti-government voices to be heard though they are far from being univocal right-wing or whites-only spaces.

The SABC has, for most of the period, while increasing its footprint and attracting new black viewers, lost former viewers, esteem and money and become an institution that seems to be in permanent crisis. Yet regardless of this, or elite criticism of the SABC, public opinion data tells a rather different story about how broadcast journalism is seen by ordinary people. Since the relevant questions have been asked, the SABC has been the most trusted national institution in South

Africa, followed closely by e-tv (with e-tv overtaking SABC in the most recent 2009 survey which suggests that the criticisms of the SABC have had some effect). Both consistently score higher than newspapers, as well as other institutions such as the courts, policy and army.

Figure 6. Trust in News Media and Other Institutions



## Print

Before the end of *apartheid*, South African news print media were divided into sharply opposing camps. On the one hand, most of the Afrikaans-medium press (along with the SABC) sought to justify, for an internal white audience in particular, the *apartheid* system. Most of the white, liberal English-medium press, usually linked to business interests, and some private radio stations such as Radio 702 opposed the *apartheid* regime and the National Party government, though they may have been uncertain as to what alternatives they supported. The third important grouping was a group of black-owned papers who strongly and vociferously opposed *apartheid*, ranging from *The Sowetan* to an alternative, radical press usually funded by foreign donors. These latter two groups, however,

were often subjected to heavy censorship and draconian media restrictions, even closure, designed by the National Party government to prevent alternative, critical debates and news from reaching either white or black South Africans.

Two important trends mark the change from the old to new South Africa in print media. First, the commercial, formerly white English and Afrikaans print media have appeared to move closer to each other ideologically, providing increasingly critical assessments of the performance of the ANC government. Second, the old *apartheid*-era, left-wing alternative papers like *South*, *New Nation*, *Grassroots*, *Vrye Weekblad* (along with the more commercial *Weekly Mail*, now *Mail & Guardian*) which had been voices of anti-government, investigative journalism had operated largely on the basis of foreign funding. (Opatrny, 2006, Switzer and Adhikari, 2000) Once a new democratically elected government took power, foreign donors withdrew from this area of funding support and these publications failed to cope. From one perspective, the editors of these papers failed to read the mood and interests of their readers and build a strong basis for survival. Others, however, argue that they fell victims to what Robert Horwitz called the 'commercial juggernaut' of a well-established commercial press, with sophisticated marketing and distribution networks, that has taken a strong stance to inhibit any profound project of social transformation.

Have the print media changed significantly since liberation? At various points, ANC leaders from Mandela on have railed against what they characterized as unreformed white media, and the Human Rights Commission, in its hearings into media complicity in racist practices, followed this line of argument. The later careers of journalists who worked in these alternative publications gives support for arguing both that the alternative press represented radical views out of touch with general citizens or that they were politically restrained by commercial pressures. Ryland Fisher, a former journalist on *Grassroots*, rose to become editor of the country's oldest newspaper, the *Cape Times* but was moved out after a few years during which the paper's circulation plummeted – in part, critics alleged, because Fisher was pushing a political line that many of the paper's traditional readers disliked. From the point of view of Fisher and his supporters, it was his refusal to follow the commercial logic of the Independent Group and their marketing strategies that led to his removal. The *Mail & Guardian* survived, but as a paper highly critical of the new government, though scarcely a paper supporting the official opposition, the white-dominated Democratic Alliance.

As a result of the convergence of the former white English and Afrikaans media and the disappearance of a radical left-wing press, there is, in effect, no daily newspaper that regularly conveys and supports government policies. While the ANC toyed with ideas of starting its own newspaper, it eventually opted for an online news site, *ANC Today*, which became a favorite vehicle for Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki to disseminate party positions as well as his own personal, often highly idiosyncratic views on topics like HIV-AIDS. South Africa must be one of the few countries in the past decades where an acting president took such an active part in writing large parts of the party's weekly political communication.

The fairly strong critiques of the ANC in most of the print media have remained in spite of ownership of many print media houses passing from white into black control, with many of the latter prominent ANC members. The broadsheets produced by them have also become dependant on increasingly large numbers of black readers. This might seem to destroy the credibility of any analysis that argues that ownership controls media content, but the political economy school has found ways of trying to salvage some coherence by arguing for class and economic interests of the owners as key determinants. (Berger, 2004, Berger, 2002, Tomaselli, 2004). These arguments tend, however, to neglect crucial differences in coverage and political stance between newspapers in the same group produced for different audiences.

A paradigm example of the difficulty of assigning political allegiance or content to the role of the owners can be seen in the role and importance of the political cartoonist Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro). A former struggle activist with strong ANC sympathies, Zapiro's work has consistently excoriated the governing party on matters ranging from scandal and corruption to President Thabo Mbeki's theories and policies on HIV-AIDS. He is currently being sued by current President Jacob Zuma for defamation after the publication of hostile cartoons about Zuma during the latter's rape trial. He has been named Journalist of the Year in South Africa because of his influence and is arguably the most important single media producer in the post-*apartheid* period. He publishes his work in the *Sowetan*, *Mail & Guardian*, and *Sunday Times*, three of the country's most influential papers, but all belonging to different media groups, which suggests that his political sensibilities are shared quite widely across the political spectrum, whatever the ownership or racial grouping of readers.

A third major trend in print media in the post-*apartheid* era has been the rise of the tabloid press which has now outstripped older papers in terms of sales and

readership. The most significant of these is the *Daily Sun*, started by a veteran white Afrikaner journalist, Deon du Plessis in collaboration with the former pro-apartheid media group Naspers. Many politically progressive critics have seen the *Sun* and other tabloids as a retrograde development, (Glenn and Knaggs, 2008) but this misses the ways in which Du Plessis and his team drew on the experience of tabloids in other developing countries, particularly India, to find ways of reaching new readers for whom they became an indispensable guide to living in and coping with the new South Africa. (Wasserman and du Bois, 2006, Jones et al., 2008). While these papers have not, for the most part, involved themselves directly with party political or electoral issues, their potential influence should not be underestimated because they seem to enjoy the trust and interest of their readers.

## **New media**

Given the extent of the digital divide and the importance of English on new media forms such as the Internet, the obvious conclusion is that new media have predominantly been a space for a privileged minority to engage in political debates and discussions. For many whites, writing in English or Afrikaans, the Internet provided a space where they were able to escape public media spaces and indulge either in nostalgia for an old South Africa, or rail against the new. President Mbeki on several occasions made public the contents of e-mails circulating among white South Africans to complain about resistance to change and the evidence of lingering racism.

Yet it may be that the two most interesting uses of new media for political communication have not been by white South Africans but by the ANC in official guise (ANC Today--<http://www.anc.org.za/>) or the Friends of Jacob Zuma website (<http://www.friendsofjz.co.za/>) set up by Zuma supporters to raise money for him and rally support after his removal from the office of Deputy President. The former site acted as the ANC's attempt to set the agenda for political coverage but also reacted against what it saw as unfair coverage from mainstream media. The latter became a virtual rallying point for Zuma supporters and may have played an important role in helping an anti-Mbeki coalition to form within the ANC, particularly during Zuma's rape trial when the site carried substantive reports that were often at odds with what mainstream media were reporting.

## **Conclusion**

How well, then, have the media performed in the new South Africa, and what role will they come to play? While Mandela and other railed against an unreconstructed white press, those opposed to the ANC, like former DA leader Tony Leon, argue, with some force, that many reporters in South Africa, fearful of appearing racist or questioning any aspects of the new democracy, abandoned a proper Fourth Estate role as skeptical interrogators of government and turned themselves into 'praise-singers' of the new government and overlooked major flaws and problems in the Mandela presidency in particular. (Leon, 2008) Others argue that this trend already started during the struggle, where the liberal press began to ignore human rights violations by the ANC, or justify them as defensive reactions to provocations by apartheid security forces or allied organizations such as the Inkatha Freedom Party (Welzel, 198X; People's War, 200X).

There is no doubt some truth in all these claims and perceptions. The media have by turns probably been too servile and too critical. Yet there have been moments where the print media and particularly the independent media, have performed very well. Before and during the Polokwane conference that led to the rise of Jacob Zuma to the presidency of the ANC and the supplanting of Thabo Mbeki, the media played a strong and robust role in reflecting the debates and arguments from both camps.

## **Media organizations**

Our brief, descriptive tour of the importance of South African media in political communication would be incomplete without at least some mention of the fact that the country is characterized by a relatively dense web of civil society organizations, many of which are actively involved in debate about press freedom and partisan balance, and a few are exclusively devoted to these issues, such as the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism and the Freedom of Expression Institute.

While the South African constitution protects the freedom of speech and media, the new government has not been above trying to rein in what it saw as an overly hostile, irresponsible press. It has introduced various pieces of legislation or other regulations publication, and other legislation attempting to define and outlaw hate speech in overly broad terms. From time to time, there have also been calls for a

National Media Development Agency which would support the development of black-owned and presumably more pliant media houses. These attempts have usually been successfully countered by South Africa's vigilant civil society, including organizations such as the South African Freedom of Expression Institute (Duncan, 2008), usually through warnings of court challenges to their constitutionality.

## Foreign media in South Africa

Finally, an important feature of the South African media landscape is its sensitivity to international news media. The National Party's attempts to manipulate news media coverage of *apartheid* were not only limited to South Africa. The "Information Scandal" of the mid 1970s revealed that it had tried to buy a number of newspapers around the world, including the *Washington Times*, in order to increase favorable international coverage. This attempt may have failed but it revealed an ongoing trend: the extent to which elite domestic debates were increasingly mediated by sensitivity to international opinion of South Africa. Thus, South African media coverage of major domestic events often includes coverage of how the rest of the world has covered those very same events, or what we might call "media triangulation."

While this sensitivity might be unsurprising for a country that depends heavily on foreign investment, it also has deeper psychological roots. While the ANC enjoyed favorable coverage from the liberal or left-wing international media during the last years of its struggle against *apartheid* as well as during the Mandela government, Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism did much to change that. (Power, 2003) One of the key developments in the post-apartheid period has been the way in which international media have treated Africa and South Africa more harshly. (Schraeder and Endless, 1998) After Rwanda and Darfur, and the more recent violence in Zimbabwe and Kenya, international Afro-pessimism has revived and in many journalistic accounts, the question about South Africa is whether it can be an exception to the rule, or misrule. (Guest, 2004)

The ANC certainly has showed itself more sensitive, on many occasions, to international news stories about the country than to internal criticisms. Thus when the BBC reported on the high rates of crime in the country, or André Brink wrote about the 'tsunami of crime' in *Le Monde*, the government felt compelled to respond

at length, while the internal criticisms tended to be ignored. Currently, while South Africa is due to host the 2010 Soccer World Cup, international media attention tends to focus on the high crime rate in South Africa and the dangers this poses for foreign teams and tourists, showing that this has become the dominant image of South Africa in foreign media perceptions.

## II. Political Parties

Political parties are an essential part of political communications process, recruiting the country's future leaders, aggregating voter preferences, articulating interests, presenting alternative ideas of how the country should be governed, and mobilizing mass political participation. Since 1990, South Africa's parties, particularly opposition parties, have revealed their deficiencies both in terms of resources as well as skills and imagination. These problems have been exacerbated, however, by a regulatory framework that has implicitly created a "home field advantage" for the governing party.

Any analysis of the country's party system must proceed from the fact that just two parties that functioned under the *apartheid* political system remain in the current democratic system: the official opposition Democratic Alliance (which can be directly traced back to the liberal Democratic Party, and before that the Progressive Federal Party) and the Inkatha Freedom Party, which governed the old KwaZulu homeland. Three current parties have their origins in the anti-*apartheid* struggle: the governing African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress and the Azanian People's Organization. All other parties have been formed since 1994.

Thus, virtually all of the country's political parties have been on various learning curves attempting to master the arts of democratic communication and organization. The former liberation organizations have also faced the task of having to *unlearn* many of the habits of secrecy, the cult of the leader, strict discipline, intolerance of dissent, and loyalty to comrades, developed during their years in exile (Glenn, 2008a).

Based largely on the credit in earned by leading the struggle to overthrow apartheid, as well as an innovative and forward looking campaign, the ANC won the founding 1994 election with a resounding 62 percent of the vote. And based at least partly on considerable public satisfaction with its delivery of infrastructure

and development, it steadily increased its proportion of the popular vote over the next two elections to 66 percent in 1999, and 69 percent in 2004, with a slight regression in 2009 to just under 66 percent. Yet as we have already seen, the increasing ANC vote totals between 1994 and 2004 occurred alongside a simultaneous counter trend of rapidly declining voter turnout. One of the main reasons behind declining participation and increasing ANC dominance has been that the country's political parties – particularly the opposition parties, have failed to develop into effective vote-gathering machines.

In terms of voter identification with political parties, the ANC has indeed maintained a decisive advantage over the opposition parties in terms of partisan identification. However, the absolute level of voter identification with the ANC has never been overwhelming. Indeed there has been at any given time a substantial share of the electorate with no strong ties to any political party. But while there is no evidence of any secular increase in identification with the ANC, there seems to have been – with some fluctuation -- a steady decrease over time in identification with opposition parties. This suggests that as voters moved away from opposition parties such as the NP, they move into the independent column rather than to the ANC.

.Previous statistical analyses of the factors affecting South Africans' voting choices have consistently identified the crucial role of voters' images of whether a given party is inclusive, representing all South Africans, or exclusive, representing one group to the exclusion of others. (Mattes, 1995, Mattes and Piombo, 2001, Ferree, Forthcoming, Herzenberg 2009) In contrast to the usual expectations advanced by analysts of elections in divided societies (e.g. Horowitz, 1986), few voters are attracted to a party because they see it as representing their group to the exclusion of others. On the contrary, most voters are repelled away from parties with such an image.

This is not good news for South Africa's opposition parties, because no opposition party has ever been able to convince a majority, or even substantial minority of voters that they are inclusive, representing the interests of all. Opposition parties enjoy low levels of voter trust. Opposition parties have failed to create the crucial image of inclusiveness. Perhaps most telling is the fact that opposition parties enjoy low levels of voter visibility. Only small minorities tell survey researchers that that any opposition party represents the "interests of one group only." The most frequent answer is for people to say they "haven't heard enough" to know who an opposition party represents.

Few opposition parties give evidence of a well-thought out strategy to court voters on a continuous basis by using their parliamentary platform or other events as opportunities to generate free media publicity between elections. Most wait and mount their campaign in the six to eight weeks leading up to the election, at which point it is far too late to shape or reshape your public image in any significant way.

Such asymmetries occur not only in how parties present themselves to the voters, but are also manifest in terms of their abilities to reach voters. During the 2009 election, the ANC was able to attract 25 percent of the electorate to one of its campaign rallies, eight times as many as its nearest competitors the DA and COPE. The governing party contacted one out every five eligible voters (20 percent), three quarters of these in person, compared to 9 percent and 8 percent respectively for the DA and COPE. But overall, just 25 percent of all voters were contacted by any political party. Comparatively, this puts South Africa slightly above recent campaigns in places like Mexico (18 percent), Indonesia (15 percent) or Bulgaria (12 percent), but far lower than Mozambique (36 percent), Taiwan (41 percent), Hungary (61 percent) or the United States (72 percent) (Beck and Gunther 2010). These data also reveal that party activities remain firmly within the ambit of traditional face to face politics. Mass direct mailing and telephone canvassing, let alone more technologically intensive methods such as SMS or email, are almost completely absent from the repertoire of South Africa's political parties.



Much of this is a function of ill-considered strategy and lack of imagination. But much of it is also due to a series of rules that systematically work against the interests of opposition parties. First, television advertising is one of the quickest ways that an opposition party, particularly a new one, could build an image in the public mind. Yet because many media advisors had warned against American-style television-based electoral campaigning out of a fear that this would mean domination of politics by moneyed interests, television election advertising was not allowed in South Africa between 1994 and 2008 (with the exception of short “public election broadcasts” which were allocated based on existing legislative representation and the number of candidates standing). The broadcast regulatory body, ICASA, surprisingly reversed itself ahead of the 2009 campaign, promulgating new regulations that gave all parties free television space to broadcast their own advertisements, and distributed that space not according to legislative seats but on the basis of the number of candidates fielded. Both of these seemed suspiciously tailored to assist COPE, the new breakaway party from the ANC. However, because these new rules came into effect very late in the day, and because the actual free time was allocated to parties even later, many smaller parties were never in a position to produce the advertisements and take advantage of this new opportunity.

Second, radio and newsprint advertising is relatively expensive, and few opposition parties have the financial means to run sustained advertising campaigns. Third, while public funding has been available to political parties since 1997, the lion’s share of this money (90 percent) is allocated to parties based on their national and provincial legislative representation. Ten percent of the fund is divided amongst the provincial legislatures, depending on their size, and then given equally to each party represented in that assembly. All of this means is that the ruling ANC receives the great proportion of these public funds.

Public funds, moreover, cover only a small share of all campaign expenses. In 1999, for example, parties spent an estimated R300 to R500 million during the campaign, with only R53 million coming from the public purse. Political parties are not required to disclose any funds donated by private sources, but it is widely believed that the ANC (due to its control over public policy and state contracts) and the DA (due to its historical links with the business community) receive far more private donations than any other political party. Certainly, only the ANC and to a lesser extent DA are able to employ professional, permanent staff for things like fundraising, market research, policy development or publicity. And in the 2004 campaign, these two parties dominated the rest across all forms of advertising

media, with the ANC outpacing the DA in spending on paid outdoor advertising (like billboards, murals and ads on taxis) by R12 million to just R200,000, and in print advertising by R3.8 million to R800,000. Yet the DA actually purchased more radio time than the ANC by R5.9 million to R4.8 million. Other opposition parties were largely restricted to a heavy reliance on streetside posters that could contain only very simple messages and captions.

Thus, while it now has competent, effective and largely autonomous electoral machinery, the institutionalization of South Africa's elections will remain incomplete until voters are presented with at least two or more effective party organizations that are able to provide voters with a visible and credible choice and reason to vote.

## **Conclusion**

These impressions might lead one to conclude that South Africa is on the path of what Hallin and Mancini characterize as the 'liberal' drift towards an apolitical press and media, driven by professional standards, focused on issues rather than any deep-seated and ideological rivalries. (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) One could adduce in support of this that there have been decreasing rates of electoral participation and of party membership during the period to argue that much of the heat has gone out of political partisanship in post-apartheid South Africa. This is part of the truth about political communication in the new South Africa, but it is only part of the truth. In fact, Adrian Hadland, in the most significant attempt to apply the Hallin-Mancini model in an examination of South African print media post-1994, concluded that South Africa was closer to the Polarized Pluralist model than the Liberal or Democratic Corporatist model, while sharing significant features with the latter two. (Hadland, 2007) It may be safest to conclude that South Africa in its mix of forms of political communication makes any imported model an imperfect fit.

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# Appendix

**Table 1:**

	Black	White	Coloured	Indian	Racial Differences
<b>Cognitive Engagement</b>					
Interest in Politics	<b>24</b>	(15)	17	20	9
Discusses Politics	20	(15)	21	<b>23</b>	8
Interested in 2009 Campaign	<b>22</b>	10	(8)	(8)	14
<b>Virtual Engagement</b>					
Radio News	88	89	(80)	<b>93</b>	13
Television News	(82)	95	93	<b>97</b>	15
Newspaper	(48)	82	57	<b>86</b>	38
<b>Physical Engagement</b>					
<i>Voting</i>					
Reported Voting in 2004 Last Election	66	(50)	58	<b>73</b>	23
<i>Campaign Activity</i>					
Attend Campaign Rally	<b>38</b>	10	11	(2)	36
Work for candidate / party	<b>4</b>	1	3	(0)	4
Contribute money	1	0	1	0	1
<i>Communing</i>					
Attend community meeting	<b>59</b>	(18)	34	39	41
Join with others to raise issue	<b>44</b>	(17)	24	20	27
<i>Contacting</i>					
Local councillor	<b>32</b>	(10)	18	12	22
MP	<b>14</b>	5	4	(1)	13
Government official	<b>16</b>	6	8	(3)	13
Religious leader	<b>27</b>	(14)	34	23	20
Traditional leader	<b>17</b>	(1)	(1)	4	16
Other local influential	<b>15</b>	10	13	(9)	6
<i>Unconventional Activity</i>					
Protest	<b>22</b>	6	15	(3)	19
Use force / violence	<b>9</b>	2	2	(0)	9